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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 005759

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR

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TAGS: [DR](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#)

SUBJECT: DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: DISPUTE OVER RE-ELECTION OF
PRESIDENT MEJIA

Classified By: Ambassador Hans Hertell for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The ruling Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD) is wrangling internally over whether to nominate President Mejia as its candidate in the national election next May. Other aspirants to the PRD nomination, arguing that presidential re-election violates party policy and that the unpopular Mejia will drag the PRD to defeat, are preparing to hold a "plebiscite" of party members on the re-election issue October 19. Mejia and his PPH faction have called on the PRD rank and file to boycott the referendum and requested that it be his own vulnerabilities and is by no means assured of victory. End summary.

The Re-election Issue

¶2. (C) Last year, the Dominican Congress -- controlled by President Hipolito Mejia's PPH (Presidential Project Hipolito) faction of the PRD -- amended the constitution to permit presidential re-election for the first time since 1994. Subsequently Mejia announced his intention to run as the PRD candidate in the May 2004 election. Seven other aspirants to the PRD nomination, including Vice President Milagros Ortiz-Bosch, Tourism Minister (and PRD Secretary General) Rafael "Fello" Subervi, and PRD President Hatuey Decamps, have publicly opposed this plan, arguing that it violates a PRD tradition of opposing re-election ever since the administrations of the late president Joaquin Balaguer and dictator Rafael Trujillo. The challengers also argue that Mejia, who according to a recent international poll is the least popular elected president in Latin America, cannot win the election and will drag the PRD to defeat. One influential PRD senator, who was coordinator in the 2000 election, told pollsters October 15 that if Mejia becomes the candidate, he will lose and "bury the PRD."

PRD "Plebiscite"

¶3. (U) To strengthen their hand, the challengers have mobilized party machinery to hold a "plebiscite" of all 1.6 million PRD members on the re-election issue. Originally set for October 12, the balloting of the membership is now to take place October 19 as

President Mejia's Response

¶4. (U) President Mejia and other PPH leaders have called on the PRD rank and file to boycott the plebiscite, on grounds that the party statutes do not provide for such a grass-roots referendum. They say the nomination should be decided at a national PRD convention

The Seven in Disarray

¶5. (U) The seven challengers met as a group 23 times to coordinate their positions, but failed in their effort to choose one candidate to confront Mejia or even to agree on a selection method, such as a rump convention or an opinion poll of PRD members. The latest meeting October 15 broke up with the group in disagreement; Secretary General Subervi on October 16 announced

Comment

¶6. (C) Many of the PRD's mid- and upper-level officials support Mejia, and none of the challengers has so far gathered enough momentum to overcome him. We do not expect the outcome of the plebiscite, which because of the boycott will not represent the entire PRD membership, to significantly affect Mejia's chances of becoming the candidate. He might prevail in the convention by negotiating with Subervi, who has so far rejected the possibility of accepting the vice presidency

¶7. (C) A prospect of defeat of the nation's biggest political party may add to widespread public uncertainty arising from the unfavorable economic

HERTELL